

Never Be Late Again

Adult ADD Time Management Tips



From **ADDitude's** Experts

ADDITUDE
LIVING WELL WITH **ATTENTION DEFICIT**

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Why ADD adults are usually late... and how to improve your time-management skills so you'll be on time, every time.

TIPS BY KATHLEEN NADEAU, PH.D.
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I'm late, I'm late for a very important date. No time to say hello, good-bye, I'm late, I'm late, I'm late."

These famous lines from the 1951 Disney movie *Alice in Wonderland* make me wonder: Does the White Rabbit have attention deficit disorder (ADD ADHD)? He sure seems to have trouble sticking to his schedule.

Time management is a big problem for people with ADD. Everyone is late on occasion, but many ADDers run behind schedule more often than not. They are late to meetings. They stand up their friends. They pick up the kids late from school. They leave others waiting as they scramble to finish last-minute tasks or find misplaced wallets, cell phones, or keys.

ADDers don't intend to be inconsiderate or disrespectful. But because of chronic tardiness, they're often perceived that way. That misperception is one of the reasons why people with ADD have trouble maintaining good relationships with friends, family members, and co-workers.

1. What does it mean to be "on time?" Plan to arrive early.

ADDers often think they should arrive at the scheduled start of an appointment or meeting. Big mistake. Always aim to arrive 15 minutes before your appointment time.

When setting a time for a meeting, take a lesson from effective salespeople: Underpromise and overdeliver. That is, say you'll be there by such-and-such a time, but get there early.

If the prospect of facing empty time if you do arrive early horrifies you, keep a magazine, book, or stack of bills that need to be paid in a bag near the door, and grab it on the way out.

2. How long does it really take?

Time yourself on frequently traveled routes. You may be surprised to find that your “10-minute” trip to the grocery store really takes 20 minutes. Stop underestimating your transit time.

If you’re planning a trip you’ve never made before, look up the route on an online service, like **Google Maps**, to find out how long the trip will take. If you’ll be traveling during rush hour, add an extra 20 percent to your estimate

3. Focus on the departure time, not the appointment time.

Determine your departure time by adding 10 minutes to each half hour of travel time. With the extra time, you’ll feel much less rushed should you run into traffic or another unforeseen delay.

4. Set two alarms, not one.

Set two alarms (a clock, a cell phone, or a computer), one that will go off five minutes before departure time and a second that will sound when it’s time to leave.

STRATEGY: When the first alarm sounds, stop whatever you’re doing and jot a quick sentence or two on a sticky note indicating where you left off. Try to be out of the door before the second alarm sounds

5. Getting out the door—prepare ahead of time

If you’re among those who suffer from I-can’t-find-it syndrome, the best remedy is obvious: better preparation. Think about what you’ll wear, and lay out your clothes in advance. Place everything you’ll need to take along by the door in cubbies labeled by day. Think about where you’re going, and make sure you have good directions and the telephone number of the person you’re meeting—in case you get lost or run into traffic.

Because they’re so distractible, it’s almost impossible for many ADDers to make it out the door on time. Avoid being sidetracked on the way to the car by reminding yourself of what you are doing, out loud and repeatedly: “I’m going to the car, I’m going to the car, I’m going to the car.” Or use a visual cue, such as the dial of a **Time Timer** device. Find what works for you.

6. Don’t fall into “one-more-thing-itis.”

One reason ADD adults feel rushed is that they habitually try to cram in “one more thing,” the additional task that so often derails plans.

One-more-thing-itis is a form of distractibility — the phone rings, you answer it, you notice that the table needs to be cleared, or a plant needs to be watered, and, once again, you run late.

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STRATEGY: Think through the steps you'll take before you leave the house. Gather belongings and double-check directions, if needed, the night before. Avoid getting sidetracked as you head to the door by reminding yourself, out loud and repeatedly, "I'm leaving now, I'm going to the car."

7. Imagine failure—and success

ADDers often underestimate the consequences of showing up late to important meetings. To counter this tendency, spend a few seconds imagining what the waiting person would think and feel. What would she say? What sort of facial expression would she have?

Now imagine the look of approval and the friendly greeting you get when you show up on time. Bask in that feeling of success as you move toward your goal.

General Tips for Adult ADHD

Time Management:

1. Build routine tasks into your weekly schedule.

When do you feel most stressed—in the morning, before work and school, or before dinner, when the kids need picking up and dinner needs preparing?

Instead of filling the gas tank or stopping to grab the ingredients for dinner on the fly, map out—and stick to—a weekly schedule that accounts for each of these tasks. Lock in times for doing necessary weekly chores, such as grocery shopping and laundry, to prevent running out of milk or clean clothes.

STRATEGY: Shift to-do items into less stressful times. For example, if mornings are more rushed, fill the gas tank on the way home.

2. Don't say "yes" out of habit — or guilt.

Many of us over-commit out of a desire to please our family, friends, or co-workers.

STRATEGY: Get in the habit of saying, "I'd like to, but let me check my schedule," instead of giving an automatic "yes." In the end, you'll please others more by being able to get things done on time, rather than always being late and rushed.

3. Set realistic goals — don't overschedule.

Can you really make a stew and pick up the kids in half an hour? Deliver yourself from trying to be supermom.

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STRATEGY: It's OK to plan a quick-fix meal (or to have take-out!) on busier nights. Don't feel you have to cram in three errands when you have time for only two.

4. Enlist the help of a time tutor.

Ask a friend or family member, someone who has witnessed how you spend your time, to help you identify the patterns that create time crunches in your life. **Strategy:** Do only what you can, and delegate or delete what you can't. You'll be happier (and more productive) when you are not living in a constant rush.

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